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FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1249
INFO RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 2486
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA PRIORITY 3290
RUEHTL/AMEMBASSY TALLINN PRIORITY 6912

UNCLAS VILNIUS 000333

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ZB](#) [RS](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: LITHUANIA SUPPORTS ESTONIA BUT MAY 9 PASSES
WITHOUT MAJOR INCIDENT

REF: A. TALLINN 297
[1](#)B. TALLINN 290

[1](#)1. Summary: Lithuanians have been speaking up about Russian policies in many ways following the violence in Tallinn surrounding Estonia's decision to move the Bronze Soldier monument and demonstrations outside the Estonian Embassy in Moscow. The events have tapped a deep reserve of anti-Russian resentment and paranoia felt since the occupation. End Summary.

Public Demonstrations

[1](#)2. On May 4, picketers gathered near the Russian embassy in Vilnius to protest Russia's policy towards Estonia. The group, which chanted, "Hands off of Estonia!" numbered about 50 and was comprised of mostly right-wing and nationalist groups such as Lithuanian Movement, the Lithuanian Freedom Fighters Union, and the Young Conservatives' League. The following day, the mainstream Liberal Movement Party staged a support action near the Estonian embassy. This demonstration was smaller, with approximately 15 participants who carried banners reading, "None of Putin's Business," "Estonians: We're With You, Honest," and "We buy Estonian."

[1](#)3. On May 8, despite rainy weather, one to two thousand Lithuanians gathered in Cathedral Square in central Vilnius for the biggest demonstration of support for Estonia. PM Gediminas Kirkilas and Parliamentary Speaker Viktoras Muntianas spoke to the crowd and many other MPs also attended. Lithuanian, Estonian, and Latvian flags flew as participants of all ages chanted "Estija" (Estonia) and expressed their support for the Estonians. Black, white, and blue balloons were visible in the crowd and participants held up a ribbon in the red, gold, and green of the Lithuanian flag that stretched more than 100 yards. Bands performed a few songs with lyrics expressing Baltic solidarity. Some participants joined hands to form a chain in remembrance of The Baltic Way action held on August 23, 1989. The demonstration was completely peaceful. Cars observed around Vilnius flew miniature Estonian and Lithuanian flags side by side.

[1](#)4. Some reactions were less constructive. On May 2, a man threw eggs at the Estonian embassy. He was arrested and fined LTL 300 (USD 120). A police patrol discovered another act of vandalism on May 6, on the Green Bridge in Vilnius. The words, "Ruskies - out," along with a red star hanging from a gallows, were painted at the base of a sculpture of a Red Army soldier placed on the bridge in 1952 to symbolize Soviet ideology. The graffiti was quickly painted over.

Public Statements

¶5. The GOL has made repeated statements in support of Estonia. The Lithuanian and Latvian delegations to the interparliamentary Baltic Assembly issued a joint statement condemning "the violent and destructive actions performed in Tallinn" and asserting that "the decision to rebury the remains of soldiers buried near the Bronze Soldier monument is a prerogative of Estonia as an independent country and intervention of other countries into the internal matters of Estonia is not permissible."

¶6. President Valdas Adamkus made his position clear in an interview with Ziniu Radijas on May 8, saying, "the EU should strictly and clearly tell Russia: make up your mind. All actions of this kind are closing doors (and you risk losing) cooperation with European countries."

¶7. The Chairman of the Lithuanian Conservative Party, Andrius Kubilius, went so far as to argue that the Lithuanian president should no longer be directly elected because of the threat of Russian influence. (Former President Rolandas Paksas was impeached in part because he was accused of being under Russia's influence.) Kubilius said that the Conservatives had started making a plan to contain Russia eighteen months ago, but the strategy had become even more important in the wake of recent events in Estonia. PM Kirkilas and parliamentary Speaker Viktoras Muntianas were among those who quickly spoke out against the proposal.

Peaceful Commemoration -----

¶8. On May 9, approximately two thousand people, mostly pensioners and war veterans, gathered at Antakalnis cemetery in Vilnius for the official commemoration of the 62nd anniversary of the end of World War II. Representatives of the Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Kazakh embassies attended the ceremony. Russian embassy representative Dmitry Tsvetkov told journalists, "The things that happened to the

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monument in Tallinn, and the chosen form and time of its replacement show that people do not understand the essence of that day: it is a commemoration of those who perished, which should not be confused with politics. Those people have made a political mistake." At Rasu cemetery, one of the oldest in Vilnius, we saw fresh flowers placed on the graves of those who had died in WWII. Most of these were Polish soldiers. Red flowers were also left at the base of the statue of soldiers on the Green Bridge.

¶9. Despite increased tension this May 9 in light of the events in Estonia and Moscow, the day passed in Lithuania without significant incident. There was a slightly larger than usual turnout at the event at Antakalnis cemetery, but no major disturbances.

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